NAXOS

Benjamin James

DALE

(1885–1943)

The Romantic Viola

Suite • Phantasy

Introduction and Andante for Six Violas

Yuko Inoue, Viola • Stephen Coombs, Piano

Benjamin James Dale (1885–1943): The Romantic Viola
Suite for Viola and Piano in D major, Op. 2
Introduction and Andante for Six Violas, Op. 5 · Phantasy for Viola and Piano, Op. 4

Edwin Evans wrote of Dale in *The Musical Times* on 1st May 1919: "'He has written fewer and better works than any English composer of his generation.' That is the considered opinion of a well-known English musician."

Benjamin James Dale was born on 17th July 1885 in Crouch Hill, North London. His father, Charles James, was a self-taught amateur musician and successful businessman who both founded and became principal of the Metropolitan College of Music in Holloway. His brother Henry was awarded the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1936 and was very supportive of Benjamin, who was ten years his junior. In September 1900, aged fifteen, Benjamin Dale entered the Royal Academy of Music, along with an old friend, the pianist and composer York Bowen, with whom he kept a close friendship for the rest of his life. Dale, Bowen and another of his contemporaries, Arnold Bax, all studied composition under the hugely influential Frederick Corder. At the same time, in 1900, the great virtuoso and father of the modern viola, Lionel Tertis, became professor of viola at the Royal Academy and took it upon himself to encourage colleagues and students such as Dale and Bowen to compose for an instrument that had almost no existing solo repertoire. Tertis's influence is evident as, while still a student at the RAM, Dale wrote the *Suite for Viola and Piano in D major, Op. 2* for him, following the huge success of his first major composition, his *Piano Sonata in D minor, Op.1*, that was written for and first performed by the then famous concert pianist Bowen on 14th November 1905.

The opening two movements of the *Suite*, originally entitled *Fantasy-Prelude* and *Romance* respectively, were given their première by Tertis and Bowen on 30th October 1906. This was followed by a performance of the complete work in 1907. Tertis, who was particularly fond of the first two movements, asked Dale to orchestrate them. The orchestrated versions were subsequently performed at a Royal Philharmonic Society concert conducted by Arthur Nikisch on the 18th May 1911.

The piece opens with fanfare-like chords on the piano that give a strong feeling of youth, confidence and incredible happiness. The second movement, *Romance*, is elegant with glorious melodies, finishing with a forceful and majestic finale. In the original score, towards the end of the second movement, there is an extra bar of D flat major arpeggios in the piano part. We thought it appropriate to re-introduce this extra bar to give more space before the viola makes its entry into the final melody. The *Suite* is a monumental work; over thirty minutes of music that requires great virtuosity and high technical skill from both players.

In order to demonstrate how contemporary compositions were changing the world of the viola, Tertis decided to give a lecture-recital about the rise of the viola, for which he commissioned Dale to write a short piece for him and five students. The sextet, entitled *Introduction and Andante for Six Violas, Op. 5,* had its première in 1911.

Dale's teacher, Corder, wrote in his letter to *The Musical Times* in 1917:

"a work of remarkable beauty, power and originality…the six instruments all have highly independent parts, they imitate the sounds of other instruments, they do things that one would have thought impossible for any viola-player, and the effect of the whole is of an almost Beethovenish majesty and grandeur and a melodic sweep such as none other of the present generation of string-writers seems able to approach".

Dale promoted a number of techniques that were not often used in English chamber music at the time, such as pizzicato, tremolos, ponticello and harmonics in all six parts, also instructing the sixth viola's C string to be tuned down to a G in order to reach the bass A flat in the last bar, considerably extending the maximum range that is normally possible on the viola.

In 1910 a retired businessman and amateur violinist, Walter Wilson Cobbett, decided to commission eleven young British composers to each write a *Phantasy,* his own unique spelling of the more common *Fantasy.* Dale was one of those challenged, and amongst others were Bowen, Bridge and Vaughan Williams. Dale's resulting *Phantasy in D minor-major for Viola and Piano, Op. 4*, is a single movement lasting over 20 minutes, even though the suggested length had been only 12 minutes! Originally entitled *Ballade,* it may well have already been written before Cobbett's request. It was premièred on December 14th 1910 by Tertis and Bowen.

The piece has only one movement, but can be divided roughly into the following three sections:

I: *Lento* as an introduction and onto a light *Allegro*
II: *Andante espressivo*
III: A scherzo-like *Allegro molto*, a short *Andante* that leads back to *Lento*, and then *Molto lento*.

Studying the original manuscript in the Royal Academy library, I could see that Dale originally ended the piece with a flourish in D major. He changed his mind, however, and instead brought back the sublime opening tune, finishing the movement with the beautiful and heavenly melody shared between viola and piano, finally ending with the simple arpeggios in the piano under a long, high D sustained by the viola.

It was useful to have a chance to look at the original scores of all Dale's viola music, and interesting to see some of his original intentions in his compositions. There are many instances, not only in the *Phantasy* but also in the *Suite*, where although he keeps a long, *legato* melody in the piano part, the viola part for a similar or even identical melody is broken up, with *tenuto* markings to separate the *legato* line. I personally feel that this may have been Tertis's suggestion, in order to give the viola part a better chance of being heard alongside the beautiful but nevertheless somewhat thick piano writing. How willing Dale was to make such changes however remains unclear.

It is a tragedy that Dale did not compose more. In August 1914 at the outbreak of the First World War, Dale was unfortunate enough to be on holiday in Germany. He was interned at Ruhleben and did not return to England until 1918. A year after Dale's return, Edwin Evans wrote that "his admirers were looking forward with much curiosity to the composition upon which he is now engaged". Dale's health was impaired, however, and though he wrote a *Violin Sonata* in 1922, the rest of his life was spent mainly working in education, primarily at the Royal Academy, with occasional tours to New Zealand and Australia to examine for the Associated Board. Ultimately, he failed to fulfil the earlier expectations of many, including his former teacher Frederick Corder. Dale died on 30th July 1943, just after his 58th birthday.

This recording was made following the success of a Viola Festival, *The British Viola – Romantic and Contemporary*, that I directed with the support of the Strings faculty at the Royal Academy of Music in London in 2011-12. The festival promoted the wonderfully romantic viola repertoire that was written in the first half of the twentieth century by, amongst others, Dale, Bowen and Rebecca Clarke, alongside new repertoire by living British composers. Unashamedly romantic in style, many of the pieces had been very successful at the time, but as the style of classical music changed following the World Wars, they became outdated and all

but forgotten. I am particularly pleased that we were able to record these wonderful but under-appreciated pieces at the very institute in which they were written almost exactly a century ago.

My greatest gratitude goes to the Vaughan Williams Trust and The Royal Academy of Music for their generous contribution towards the making of this recording.

These notes were supplemented with information from the following sources:

The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians

Modern British Composer III, E.Evans, The Musical Times, 1st May 1919

A Reassessment of Benjamin Dale, Christopher Foreman

Yuko Inoue

RVW Trust

ROYAL ACADEMY OF MUSIC

Yuko Inoue

Winner of the 17th Budapest International Viola Competition, Yuko Inoue has performed throughout Europe, the United States and Japan with orchestras and as a soloist and chamber musician. She is a member of the Fibonacci Sequence Ensemble and Dante String Quartet, and has also appeared as guest principal with several orchestras such as the Philharmonia, English Chamber Orchestra, BBC Philhamonic Orchestra and the London Sinfonietta. She performs and records frequently with Britain's most eminent string quartets and chamber ensembles and in festivals such as Lockenhaus, Kuhmo, Cheltenham, Bath and Aldeburgh. She has released many chamber music recordings, with her first solo CD, *Romanze – The Romantic Viola*, voted as one of *Classic CD* magazine's Choices of the Month, earning critical acclaim from *The Strad*, *Gramophone* and Amazon. She has also recorded all three *Viola da Gamba Sonatas* and the *Chaconne* by J. S. Bach for Quartz. She is a professor at the Royal Academy of Music in London and plays on a viola by J. B. Vuillaume, kindly loaned by Mr John Sanderson.

Photo: Katie Vandyck

Stephen Coombs

Stephen Coombs first came to musical prominence when, at the age of thirteen, he won second prize at the National Piano Competition. His London début at the Wigmore Hall, only two years later, set the pattern for an international career which has won him many prizes and awards. Together with his performances of standard works, Stephen Coombs has an impressive reputation as a champion of the rarities of the piano repertoire. He records extensively for the BBC and his many commercial recordings include piano works by Arensky, Bortkiewicz, Debussy, Glazunov, Liadov, Milhaud, Ravel and Scriabin, as well as piano concertos by Arensky, Bortkiewicz, Glazunov, Goedicke, Hahn, Massenet, Mendelssohn and Pierné. Chamber music recordings include piano quintets by Vierne and Hahn, with the Chilingirian Quartet, as well as recordings of works by Hahn and Catoire featuring Coombs's own flexible chamber ensemble, *Room-music*.

RAM Viola Sextet

Yuko Inoue · Clifton Harrison · Richard Waters · Wenhong Luo · Tighan Liu · Anna Lusty

The viola sextet that appears on this recording was formed of myself and five students at the Royal Academy of Music who had taken part in the festival The British Viola – Romantic and Contemporary in 2011–12.

Left to right, Yuko Inoue, Tinghan Liu, Wenhong Luo, Richard Waters, Clifton Harrison, Anna Lusty

Benjamin Dale's compositions are relatively few in number but of great distinction. In particular it was Dale's friendship with Lionel Tertis, the father of modern viola playing, which inspired a series of outstanding works for the instrument. The monumental *Suite for Viola and Piano in D major* combines virtuosity and beautiful melodic writing, while the single movement *Phantasy for Viola and Piano* opens and concludes with a sublimely memorable tune. Written for Tertis and his pupils, the *Introduction and Andante for Six Violas* was described by Dale's teacher, Frederick Corder, as "a work of remarkable beauty, power and originality".

RVW Trust

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Royal Academy of Music

	Suite for Viola and Piano in D major, Op. 2	**33:11**
1	**Fantasy-Prelude**	**10:27**
2	**Romance**	**10:37**
3	**Finale**	**12:07**
4	**Introduction and Andante for Six Violas, Op. 5**	**10:38**
5	**Phantasy for Viola and Piano, Op. 4**	**20:05**

Yuko Inoue, Viola • Stephen Coombs, Piano
RAM Viola Sextet
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